

Roy Hay

Furnishing your garden



Talking the other day to an Australian girl who is now on her third working visit to Britain, and who has worked in many countries, we got on to the subject of the ideal climate. In spite of its uncertainties she gave Britain high marks, but wrote off the United States and Canada because of their climatic extremes. But at least, in summer in North America, if you arrange a barbecue party you do not normally have to make alternative arrangements in case of rain. All the more surprising therefore that here in Britain we have produced some delightful garden furniture for a rather limited home demand, but which is boosting our exports more and more each year.

The Elegant range of "chaises longues" or "leisure beds" as they are termed, and divans are extremely comfortable. Priced from £4 15s. to £12 19s. 6d. they come in various washable fabrics, or for those of us too idle to put them away at night, in rot proof plastic. They are light, fold away neatly for storage, and come in gay colours.

Those who do not like the modern materials may prefer

the Funchal range of garden chairs and tables made of hand woven cane in Madeira. I like particularly the rocking chair at £12 17s. 6d. with a length of 5ft. The Branson furniture—tables, benches and seats made of Iroko wood and easily dismantled by knocking out wooden wedges when they have to be put away for the winter are also excellent value. They fit unobtrusively into an old world garden where perhaps the gaily coloured modern furniture might to some folk seem out of place. Let us hope we have another summer when we can extract full value for our investment garden furniture.

A reader has asked me whether there is any advantage to be gained by applying fertilizers to naturalized daffodils after flowering. I replied that I doubted this, but suggested that a foliar feed sprayed on the foliage once or twice before it dies down might help. After all, foliar feeds stimulate root action and that is what we want from our bulbs. More important probably is to apply copious waterings now.

It is not always realized that during May the water loss from the soil through transpiration and evaporation is about the equivalent of one inch of rain—four and a half gallons to the square yard every week. On light quick draining soils the moisture deficit in the first fortnight of May is about two inches. So for naturalized bulbs in particular, strawberries and other soft fruit, shrubs, roses

and fruit trees planted earlier this year, copious waterings are needed now. Foliar feeds for recently planted shrubs, trees and roses would help greatly to stimulate root action and thus help the plants to gather up more moisture from the soil. I have really concentrated this year on mulching, both to conserve moisture on my light soil, and to cut down on the hoeing. It is difficult to work out the economics of using mulching materials such as mushroom manure or peat against the cost of hoeing a given piece of ground, say, three times during the summer. We pay in Surrey six to eight shillings an hour for jobbing help—far more, of course, for a full time gardener because you have to pay at least £3 5s. 11d. to the State before you pay the gardener.

It is difficult to estimate how many square yards a gardener can hoe in an hour because it depends on how weedy the plot is. If you can afford to employ him often enough, and if he turns up, and if it is not raining when he does, he can riffle through the weeds when they are just coming through the soil. But if the weeds get away and have to be laboriously chopped off, raked up and carted to the compost heap, obviously the area hoed in an hour will be much less.

But as far as I can work out, it is cheaper to put down a good two inch mulch of peat or mushroom compost bought in bulk, than to pay for hoeing. In the vegetable or fruit plots

straw is an excellent mulching material. It is fairly cheap and may be used between rows of soft fruit bushes—raspberries, black currants, and so on—alongside rows of runner beans, and, indeed, on many bare soil surfaces where weeds will grow.

I am convinced that the only sensible way for the owner of a garden of reasonable size to cope today is to use mulches, plant ground covering, weed smothering plants, and wherever possible to use chemical weedkillers such as paraquat.

It is often objected that paraquat in the Weedol formulation is expensive. So it is if you put it on with a watering can fitted with a normal rose that pours it over the whole bed or border. The small sprinkle bars that fit any watering can enable you to just wet the weeds and not waste the liquid on weed-free soil.

I mention all this now because by the indications of past records we may have a rather rainy summer, and if so the weeds may get on top of us. So forethought and early evasive action may well pay off. I hope, of course, that I am wrong and that we will spend our summer basking in our chaises longues.

My remarks about herons stealing fish brought an interesting comment from a reader. He says that if you have a stone or lead heron standing at the edge of your pool, no real herons will come near it. I suppose somebody makes a fibre glass heron although I

have not been able to trace a source. If not, perhaps there might be a market for such a thing.

And thinking of plastics, anyone whose old wooden rain-water butt is falling to bits might like to know that Woodman & Sons Ltd., High Street, Pinner, Middlesex, offer an 80-gallon plastic butt for £6 19s. 6d. They also offer 40 and 50-gallon plastic butts at 99s. 9d. and 119s. 6d., with tap, carriage paid.

GARDENS TO SEE

Today: Powis Castle (The National Trust), Welshpool, Montgomeryshire. 2-6. Vann (Mr. and Mrs. M. Caroe), Hambledon, Nr. Godalming, Surrey. 2-7 (and tomorrow). Dundonnell (Mr. Alan Roger, Mr. Neil Roger and Mr. Alastair Roger), by Garve, Ross & Cromarty. 2-6.

Tomorrow: Weacombe House (Mr. and Mrs. J. Greswell), Bicknoller, Taunton, Somerset. 2-7. Craigdarroch (Major H. H. Sykes), Moniaive, Dumfriesshire. 2-6.30. Ballindarroch (Lady Maud Baillie), Inverness. 2-6. Cawdor Castle (Elizabeth, Countess Cawdor), Nairn, Nairnshire. 2-6. Manor Farm (Mr. and Mrs. Angus Hood), Bledington, nr. Kington, Oxford. 2-7. Manor Farm (Major H. W. W. Hoskyns), and The Old House (Air Marshall Sir Aubrey and Lady Ellwood), North Ferriort, Somerset. 2-7. Coverwood (Mr. and Mrs. C. G. Metson), Ewhurst, Surrey. 2-7. The Mill House (Bridgadier and Mrs. G. P. Hardy-Roberts), Fittleworth, Sussex. 2-7. Hollands (Mr. and Mrs. A. Garland), Littleham, nr. Bideford, Devon. 2-7. Primrose Cottage (Dr. O. G. Morgan), Walberswick, nr. Southwold, Suffolk. 2-6. Beaucastle (Mr. G. Clancy), Bewdley, Worcestershire. 2-7.

Gardening.

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